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ABSTRACT

Four goals of reading instruction are problem solving, securing ideas, achieving state mandated standards, and making decisions. These broad goals provide general direction for teachers in teaching reading. In order to apply reading to problem solving, a teacher may propose a life-like and important problem to students. The pupils then select reading materials to obtain possible solutions. If a teacher would prefer to focus on conveying ideas through reading to students, the teacher may chose readings that will challenge pupils. In addition, quality discussions help pupils learn the important ideas from the subject matter. State mandated standards for reading provide specific objectives for teachers to follow as well as evaluation techniques for student progress. Finally, when decision-making is a goal of reading, pupils chose their reading materials according to their individual interest and developmental level. (PM)

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The Ultimate Goal of Reading Instruction.

by Marlow Ediger

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THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF READING INSTRUCTION

There might well be a plethora of ultimate goals in reading instruction. Each goal, however, needs to be assessed thoroughly. Vital criteria need development to assess objectives of reading instruction. There needs to be an overriding goal which provides vision in achieving self directed learners in the reading curriculum. What might be selected broad goals which provide general direction for teachers in teaching reading?

Reading as Problem Solving

A comprehensive objective in the teaching of reading may be to guide pupils to become quality problem solvers. Here, pupils with teacher assistance may identify relevant problems to solve. Problems chosen need to require deliberation and thought. They are considered to be relevant by learners in the reading curriculum. The problem deals with subject matter needed to solve a dilemma or a question. Pupils may then select reading materials, among other information sources, to obtain possible solutions. From the ongoing reading activities, pupils develop an hypothesis. The hypothesis is tentative and subject to evaluation. More reading might then be done to assess the hypothesis. If acceptable, with an hypothesis that works in practical situations, revisions and modifications are then not needed.

Problem solving as an ultimate objective in reading instruction emphasizes the following:

1. pupils with teacher assistance identifying life-like problems
2. pupils gathering information in working toward solution
3. pupils developing an hypothesis.
4. pupils evaluating the hypothesis
5. pupils making revisions, if necessary, to the hypothesis (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Fourteen).

The problem chosen is life-like and is important in the societal arena. School and society then are integrated, not isolated entities. There is a necessity in securing information to the selected problem; it is not trivial. Reading and other data sources are used to gather information for a solution. The consequences are noticed in the solution as to its affects. An inductive method is used in solving problems. John Dewey (1859-1952) was a leading advocate of problem solving philosophy, also known as experimentalism, in teaching pupils.

Pertaining to John Dewey, Atkinson and Maleska (1965) wrote the following:

To a follower of Dewey, education has two sides -- psychological and social: neither may be subordinated or neglected. The psychological nature of a child forms the basis for his education -- it is the teacher's responsibility to make full use of his natural, spontaneous activities. Describing original nature as spontaneously impulsive rather than passive, Dewey divided impulses into four kinds: the social impulse of communication or conversation; the constructive impulse to make things; the impulse to investigate things; and the impulse of artistic or creative expression.

With these impulses mind, said Dewey, the school must be changed from a place for sedentary listening to one for active doing and working. The teaching process must be planned to allow the child to learn wherever possible by his own experiences and, in that way, to acquire the habit of thinking. A proper solution to any problem demands intelligent thinking, which becomes the principal factor in the ability to cope with new situations. Thinking, as Dewey defined it, is the use of meanings of past experiences in the interpretation of new situations.

Reading as Securing Ideas

Many reading teachers believe that teaching subject matter is the ultimate goal of instruction. Teaching ideas, not problem solving, then is the ultimate goal of reading instruction. Mind is the most important part of the individual since mental development implies the acquisition of subject mater. To secure quality ideas, the mind needs to be challenged and stimulated. Vital ideas aid in developing the alert mind. The mental interprets the physical and social environment. Abstractions are to be preferred to that of the concrete natural and social environments. Mind interprets with ideas gleaned from what is tasted, touched, smelled, seen, and heard. Thus, the mind interprets what comes from the senses. The will and effort must be developed within the pupil to achieve optimally since there are things in life which need to be done regardless of the pleasantness of the situation in learning and achieving. interest is not adequate in learning; effort must also be put forth. The mind needs to reach out to achieve and accomplish difficult tasks. The mind, intellect, and soul unite the individual with eternity or God. The personal finite being should continually grow in the direction of the Infinite or God. The limited finite self

then needs to grow in the direction of the Infinite. This is done through growth of the intellect. The intellect achieves through ideas and abstractions received from teaching and learning in the academic disciplines. From the less complex to those increasing ideas of complexity, the learner grows academically. The limited being then becomes more mature in ideas possessed. The finite individual changes continuously, but the Infinite or God remains changeless. Thus Eternal values of Truth, Beauty, Justice, Honesty, and Goodness have always been there, but with growth of the finite, the person may reach the Infinite, in degrees. Each person needs to discover these vital concepts. The world of ideas, as in the philosophy of idealism, in reading instruction become paramount. Reasoning may be the way to determine truth. Logical thinking is vital when ascertaining truth since new ideas need to fit in with the old in the coherence theory. What is true then is logically integrated with past ideas (Ediger, 1995, Chapter Two).

Pertaining to idealism, Wahlquist (1942) wrote the following:

All philosophical schools are concerned with the nature of reality. Reality, in the philosophical sense, is the property of being real, of really existing, despite appearances, as opposed to the imaginary, the fictitious, or the merely apparent. The idealist holds that reality, i. e., the final stuff, is the nature of the mind. He believes that back of and beyond the physical world is the real world of mind or spirit. From this viewpoint, the apparent self sufficiency of nature is an illusion; nature depends upon something else, call it mind, spirit, or idea. The real substance of things, the ultimate being which explains all other things, is thought to be more than physical or material. In theological sense this ultimate reality is personified as God.

The idealist says, in effect, if one seeks for elemental things, he will not find them in matter, motion, or force, but in reason, intelligences, personality, and values. Moreover, these realities have a cosmical significance, that are essences that bring order and unity into the universe. Hence, physical bodies and forces are secondary, being, as it were, externalizations or manifestations of the mind. Also, these ultimates do not depend upon human beings for their significance; they have their independent existence.

Acquiring ideas as the ultimate goal of reading instruction emphasizes the following:

1. the reader receives abstractions from what is being read
2. the mind, or cultivation of the intellect, is the ultimate vital factor in reading development and achievement.

3. ideas obtained, to be relevant, need to integrate with accepted knowledge in order to possess coherency and truth.
4. the limited being, the young person, needs to move from being finite to the more mature reader, the infinite.
5. what is truly significant in life stresses that which goes beyond the use of the senses (touching, tasting, smelling, feeling, and seeing).

The act of reading deals with securing meaning from abstract letters, words, paragraphs, and entire selections. The use of concrete objects and illustrations assists the reader to attach ideas to subject matter read. With mental development, the pupil needs to engage in critical and creative thought to achieve abstract concepts and generalizations. Knowledge objectives from reading become more salient as do attitudinal ends. However, positive attitudes assist the learner to develop well in attaining subject matter objectives of reading instruction. Quality discussions help pupils to reveal that which has been learned from reading subject matter. Questions discussed need to reflect higher levels of cognition in order to understand the academics. The academically inclined teacher is in the best position to assist the pupil in developing well mentally. Challenge is a key concept to stress when teachers guide pupils in a quality liberal arts curriculum. The abstract, the mind, and subject matter, are vital concepts to consider in the instructional arena of reading (Ediger, 1994, 31-43).

Reading to Achieve State Mandated Standards

The high standards, high expectations, and measurement movements are emphasized much in educational literature and state expectations. State and national legislators, the President of the nation, governors of states, as well as state departments of education, are heavily involved in advocating/writing objectives for pupil attainment. These objectives/standards for pupils to achieve emphasize reading as being paramount. They are available to classroom teachers to use and implement in the teaching of reading. Pupil achievement in reading is then measured to ascertain how well the state standards have been achieved.

Measuring pupil achievement is vital in the state standards movement. Thus, the objectives need to be precise and stated in measurable terms. Learning activities in the curriculum need to be aligned with the stated objectives. Generally, the test items to measure pupil achievement are multiple choice in nature. Multiple

choice responses from pupils can be machine scored rather quickly with the results being returned to the teacher. The teacher may use the test results to plan the reading curriculum. If adequate data from the printouts are available, the teacher may use the information for diagnostic and remedial purposes to improve reading instruction.

E. L. Thorndike (1874- 1949) was an early advocate of measuring precisely what pupils had learned. Thayer 1970) wrote:

The early years of the twentieth century were conspicuous in the application of science to all phases of business and industry. It was applied not only to the invention of new products and processes but to the details of organization and administration designed to promote economy and efficiency. Experts trained in "scientific management" studied carefully the performances of workers on the job with results so fruitful in economy and efficiency that many came to be seen in "job analysis" possibilities of application not only to vocational education but also to the reform of other aspects of education as well. All that was needed, it seemed, was to identify the specific outcomes by insuring pupils engage in the activities certain to eventuate in the proper habits and skills, information, attitudes, ideals, and the like.

The new emphasis upon the selection and organization of subject mater received definite formulation in 1918 with the report of the National Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education. This commission stated the areas of concern, or the functions of the secondary school, in the form of Cardinal Principles. Its preliminary statement read, "In order to determine the main objectives that should guide education in a democracy, it is necessary to analyze the activities of the individual. Normally he is a member of a family, of a vocational group, and of various civic groups, and by virtue of these relationships he is called upon to engage in activities that enrich family life, to render important vocational services to his fellows, and to promote the common welfare."

Thorndike and his associates developed many kinds of tests to measure pupil achievement. These included arithmetic, handwriting, spelling, reading, and writing tests. The testing and measurement movement then believed that

1. precise, numerical results can be obtained pertaining to pupil achievement as revealed from tests. Presently, a single percentile may indicate achievement in learning in diverse fields of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
2. specific objectives, carefully written and designed, need

to be determined to ascertain precisely that what pupils should achieve.

3. the curriculum then should be aligned with these chosen objectives.

4. evaluation techniques need to be in the offing which measure achievement toward having attained the stated objectives of instruction.

5. feedback from test results may then be used to analyze what is left to learn to achieve the chosen ends.

The above named model is followed by state departments of education in arriving at high standards (objectives) for learner achievement. Curriculum alignment occurs when teachers provide learning activities which aid in goal attainment.

Reading as Decision Making

Reading specialists who advocate decision making programs of reading instruction tend to advocate that

1. pupils individually choose, from among alternatives, a library book to read

2. pupils choose library books which are interesting and on their individual developmental level.

3. pupils read the selected library book on their own unique optimal rate of speed and comprehension.

4. pupils read the entire library book without interruptions, emphasizing holism in reading.

5. pupils have a conference with the teacher to assess reading achievement in an informal manner (Ediger, 1998, 17- 20).

Reading instruction here is perceived by teachers as being an individual matter in pupils selecting library books to read. Each pupil is different, from the others, with unique interests, achievement level, and personality when choosing library books to read sequentially. No predetermined objectives for all pupils should be stated or determined. Pupils individually will be reading at different levels of achievement and possess diverse tastes in selecting which genre to read. Existentialism advocates that the individual makes choices, from among alternatives. Truth is subjective, not objective, and resides within the individual. The individual is the chooser, not the group nor the crowd. With an emphasis being placed upon the individual, morality becomes important. Each person, in an atmosphere of freedom, must make moral, not self centered choices in life. The emphasis here is upon freedom to choose and freedom, as a

must, to choose morality when relating to others. Literature, in the humanities, is highly important to an existentialist. Ozman and Craver (1990) wrote the following pertaining to existentialism:

The humanities loom large in an existentialist curriculum because they deal with the essential aspects of human existence such as the happy, the absurdities as well as meaning. in short, existentialists want to see humankind in its totality -- the perverted as well as the exalted, the mundane as well as the glorious, the despairing as well as he hopeful, and they feel the humanities and the arts do this better than the sciences. Existentialists, however, do not have any definite rules about what should comprise the curriculum. They believe the student - in- situation making a choice should be the deciding factor.

Although existential phenomenologists have been interested in understanding the lived experience of the learner than in the specific content of things to be learned, some of then have given attention to curriculum organization and content. The tendency, however, is to view curriculum from the standpoint of the learner rather than as a collection of discrete subjects.

Teachers of reading need to study diverse philosophies of teaching and learning. Each philosophical school of thought has implications for developing the reading curriculum. Pupils in the school setting need to achieve as optimally as possible in reading and literacy.

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